

## **Ignorance is Bliss**

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Last week my daughter Lilly Grace started eating food. Real food. Not formula, not water, not prune juice or Pedialite, but solid, honest to God FOOD. She had been watching us eat intently for several weeks and was beginning to mimic chewing motions as she stared. She had satisfied the doctor's prerequisite--sitting up in a high-chair without slumping over--and so it was determined that the hour had come... for FOOD.

Lauren and I were down right giddy in the grocery store. After our seemingly interminable treasure hunt we slipped proudly into the express lane with our powdered 100% organic rice cereal. When we got it home the actual food prep and delivery was quite the production. The adorable virgin purple plastic bowl. The green and white safety coated child spoon. The measuring, the stirring. Latching her in. Snapping the tray--watch her fingers! The outfit. The matching bib. The triple sanitized tray insert. And then of course the fight over who gets to DO it. To deliver the first glorious bite...

And when at last the hour had come for the cereal to be delivered, we watched in awe...sucking and mushing and then the dawning, the moment of infant ecstasy--yum. And her jaw was loosed and her mouth was opened.

Then something most unexpected happened. After two-three bites, Lilly Grace, reached for the spoon. To feed herself. I kid you not. (she really is quite extra-ordinary.) Once we got over our proud astonishment, we realized that we had a decision to make. Allowing her to feed herself would mean 1) cleaning up a huge mess. 2) As adorable as it is, the meal would take forever. and 3) Since little would actually make it to her belly, after all the mess and time, she would likely still be hungry.

This was the choice, we could either leave her to her own devices and take cover, or we would insist on feeding her ourselves, a move which would require a fair amount of duct tape. So there we sat. Two proud parents deciding what to do, gazing adoringly, cracking up, while a cereal smeared Lilly, sucked happily on her first spoon.

I have a picture...(Show blow up of child with spoon.)

In the end, we went with a third option--a middle way. Keeping a towel handy, Lauren wrapped her fingers around Lilly's clutched fist gave and gently guided her hand through her first supper.

Which brings me to today's gospel.

Today is Thomas' Sunday. It is the second week of Easter, when we recall the story of Jesus showing himself to Thomas. Thomas, disciple, apostle, doubter.

Thomas' role in the resurrection narrative is traditionally seen in a negative light, the disciple who is immature, weak, the one who needed special signs to believe.

This passage in the Gospel of John is actually John's version of the Pentecost event in Acts 2. On the day of resurrection Jesus appears to his disciples while they are hiding behind closed doors in Jerusalem. Jesus comes miraculously among them and imparts peace which, devastated and confused, they needed desperately. Jesus breathes on them power through the Holy Spirit, to help them overcome their fears and to empower them to go and proclaim the good news. He is risen. Death is conquered. We are forgiven. Alleluia.

Thomas missed this encounter with Jesus. When he next meets with the other disciples he is told what he missed. But he does not believe their story.

Can we blame him, really? He knew the healing miracles and the life giving preaching he experienced when traveling with Jesus, but this was simply incomprehensible. And so, Thomas told the truth. He said, I don't believe it and I don't believe you. He knew that accepting this resurrection as true, literally true, would have acute implications for the rest of his life. In short, it would change everything. It was far too important to pretend. And so he told the truth. *I won't believe you until I see and touch him myself.*

You know, I don't get it. The way we use this story to lay blame on ourselves for not trusting God enough. Counter to our sensory natures, we glorify a blinder believing and wield this disciple's name as a shame-filled accusation. Don't be a Doubting Thomas. It just doesn't make any sense. Of course Thomas wanted to see, hear, touch and feel Jesus! He was life incarnate, pure love embodied, and they had thought he was gone forever. Of course he wanted contact, deep and true. They all did, and got it.

In my opinion, Thomas' misgivings were not the hallmark of his discipleship, but rather it was his capacity for telling the truth. Instead of accusing others and ourselves of being doubting Thomases, perhaps we might label someone this authentic as a Truth Telling Thomas.

In this story Jesus does not reply with shame, he draws his beloved in to his very core. Thus our depiction of God bemoaning doubt as a grievous sin is unfounded. No, Jesus is not angered by Thomas' insistence, he is blessed.

This sense of blessing is captured masterfully in the Italian Baroque painter Caravaggio's 17th Century oil painting, *The Incredulity of Thomas*.

It is a very famous painting in which two disciples look on as Thomas' finger penetrates the wounds of Jesus. I have a picture! (Show poster of painting)

You can see here, all three disciples look intently at the wound while Jesus looks at Thomas' hand, held gently in his own as Jesus guides Thomas into himself. It is graphic and passionate, intense curiosity and desire met with tender welcome.

What does Thomas' touch have to do with mushy organic rice on a plastic spoon?

Its all about perspective I think. When Jesus says to Thomas, “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” I do not believe that he is angrily chastising Thomas as we have come to depict. Rather, he is satisfying a hunger for the real, real experience in God.

In guiding the hand of Thomas into his wounds, he is offering the most intimate union. Touch me. Know me. This is hardly a shaming move but an adoring one. I can only imagine the joy that must have come over Jesus the moment he saw Thomas “get it. “

See, God really likes us. I think we forget that when we’re hearing about Thomas. We are not in trouble for asking questions and expressing doubts. In our raw innocence, and ignorance, we are delightful to our beautiful Lord who is love and who longs to know and be known by us. Our questions and concerns are not deadly offenses, they are, I contend, more like mushy cereal on our faces. A spoon that goes in upside down. God longs to teach us. And so there is great delight when we stumble in our unknowing.

I think that when it comes to faith precepts, we take ourselves way too seriously. We pressure ourselves to assent to incongruous claims articulated through a completely other world-view. And when our integrity nudges, we either shut down, go away from church or pretend.

But this painting is dark for that very reason. The face of Christ who can never be fully known, is shadowed. We see only through a glass darkly. We use metaphor, we grasp together for glimpses of truth.

Would it be better if we didn’t need to grasp for God? Yes. If we knew God completely from the beginning until the end, being one with the Alpha and the Omega? Yes, it would be the paradise spoken of in today’s passage from Revelation. Is that where we find ourselves in our real lives right now? No.

And that’s OK. In fact it is fabulous. As Episcopalians we laud the kind of gritty inquiry Thomas embodied. To seek and to find. To work our minds and spirits to the most authentic places possible, hoping to be met in those places by the overwhelming Spiritual power of God.

At the end of every baptism the priest asks God to--

*Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.*

As Episcopalians I don’t see how we could consider Thomas anything but a hero.

Today I am issuing an invitation-- to tell the truth about what you really think and what you really want from God. Tell it to yourself, what you really need and what you fear about what you think, want and need. Know this: That scared, broken, unsure person is the one God adores.

God delights in our questions, even our doubts about the Spirit's presence and the Father's character. Because in telling the truth, like Thomas, we make room for the *aha!* The first taste of real honest to God FOOD. Soul food. Overpowering encounters with the holy that throw us to our knees crying *my Lord and my God*. Contact that changes our real lives forever. Tell the truth. Its too important to pretend. And our ignorance just might be God's bliss. *Amen.*